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The Wakhan Corridor: An Unlikely Afghan-China Link

A Research Paper

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TRANSCRIPTION - ORIGINAL FOLLOWS

The Wakhan Corridor: An Unlikely Afghan-China Link (U)

Summary

Wakhan, The long and narrow "thumb" of Afghanistan, which extends eastward between the USSR and Pakistan to China, was created in the 19th century to separate British and Russian territory. A semiautonomous district of Badakhshan Province, it is sparsely populated by Tajik and Kirghiz peoples, who have ethnic ties to groups in the adjacent areas of the USSR and China [words excised]
[lines excised]

Alternate routes to the main Wakhan also present even greater physical problems. Only treacherous trails lead from southern Pakistan [2 words illeg] the high passes of the Hindu Kush mountain. [words excised]
[lines excised]

**The Wakhan Corridor:
An Unlikely Afghan-China Link (U)**

Summary

Wakhan, the long and narrow "thumb" of Afghanistan, which extends eastward between the U.S.S.R. and Pakistan to China, was created in the 19th century to separate British and Russian territory. A semi-autonomous district of Badkhashan Province, it is sparsely populated by Tajik and Kirghiz peoples, who have ethnic ties to groups in the adjacent areas in the U.S.S.R. and China.

Alternate routes to the main Wakhan route present even greater physical problems. Only treacherous trails lead from northern Pakistan across the high passes of the Hindu Kush mountains.

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TRANSCRIPTION - ORIGINAL FOLLOWS

Background

The Wakhan Corridor, a semiautonomous district of Badakhistan Province links Afghanistan with China and forms a physical and political barrier separating Soviet Central Asia from South Asia. This mountainous eastern appendage of Afghanistan more than 260 kilometers long and 12 to 60k wide was a late 19th century creation of British Russian diplomats, the purpose of which was to physically separate Russian territory from tribal areas then within Britain's sphere of interest. Its delineation was one of the final acts in the long Anglo-Russian rivalry over control of what is now Soviet Central Asia. (C)

Few people inhabit Wakhan and settle [illeg] and nomadic encampments are widely scattered. The scanty population, difficult terrain,, and limited access to the area has fostered administrative autonomy. Traditionally, the central Afghan Government has had little influence in the district and the administration of the area has been left in the hands of the headman. (C)

The term "corridor" as applied to this area gives a misleading impression of easy transit elevations are high (3,000 to 6,300 meters), the terrain is formidable and the climate severe. High glacier scoured valleys, the [illeg] characterize the eastern half, travel through them is encumbered by boggy areas, occasional gorges, and glacial boulders. The western half is a narrow valley with steep slopes, but somewhat lower elevations. Nonetheless, trails wind through the mass of mountains and river gorges and the area historically has been a route for caravans between the [illeg] of southern Chinese Turkistan (Xiajuang Province) and Afghanistan (C)

Wakhan's curious configuration results from the piecing together of alignments from four separate boundary agreements. The northern boundary eastward from [illeg] to the Sori Qul (lake) evolved as
[3 lines illeg]

[same page, second column]

The course of Anglo-Russian diplomacy from 1869 to [illeg]. The remainder of the southern boundary from the lake to the Chinese border was defined by the Anglo-Russian Commission of 1895. The southern Wakhan boundary is a section of the Durand Line which was defined by the Anglo-Afghan agreement of 1891. (C)

Since the purpose of these boundary settlements was to ensure that Britain and Russia did not share a common frontier, there was no sense of urgency on the part of the European powers or of China to complete the boundary where Afghan and Chinese territory met. Hence a gap in the border remained that was not officially resolved until the signing of a Sino-Afghan boundary agreement in 1961 and the demarcation of this 80-km boundary the following year. (C)

The Major Route

[paragraph illeg]

(C)

The Wakhan Corridor is a semi-autonomous district of Badkhashan Province, links Afghanistan with China and forms a physical and political barrier separating Soviet Central Asia from South Asia. This semi-autonomous eastern appendage of Afghanistan, more than 260 kilometers long and 13 in 1903. It was a late 19th century creation of British Russian diplomacy, the purpose of which was to physically separate Russian territory from tribal areas then within Britain's sphere of interest. Its delineation was one of the final acts in the long Anglo-Russian rivalry over control of what is now Soviet Central Asia (1).

the course of Anglo-Russian diplomacy from 1860 to 1891. The remainder of the northern boundary from the lake to the Chinese border was defined by the Anglo-Russian Boundary Commission in 1895. The southern Sino-Russian boundary is a section of the Sino-Russian border which was defined by the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1891 (1).

Since the purpose of these boundary settlements was to ensure that Britain and Russia did not share a common frontier there was no need of arguments in the parlour of the European powers – and it took no time to complete the boundaries where Afghanistan and Chinese territory met. Hence a gap in the border remained that was not officially resolved until the signing of a Sino-Afghan boundary agreement in 1901 and the demarcation of an 80-km boundary in the following year (1).

The term "corridor" as applied to this area gives a misleading impression of one; transit elevations are high (1,000 to 2,000 meters), the terrain is formidable, and the climate severe. High, glacier-crowned walls, the *pasos* characteristic of the eastern half, travel through them is remembered by hazy areas, unusual gorges, and glacial boulders. The western half is a narrow "alley" with steep slopes, but without the lower elevations. Nevertheless, trails and through the maze of mountains and river gorges and the area historically has been a route for caravans between the coast of northern Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang Province) and Afghanistan (1).

Access to the Weibhan Corridor is restricted by terrain & high mountains. The very high mountains in both north and south of the corridor are connected by a single and very narrow pass. Only its western end and summit are visible from the south. There are headwaters of the northern rivers, a small and cold mountain lake, a large lake, a string of high peaks, glaciers, and some very few difficult tracks, cross the mountains. The big mountain ranges are between Hsueh-shan C. and the Central Door, and between Weibhan and Weibhan (C).

Webster's curious configuration results from the piecing together of alignments from four separate boundary agreements. The northern boundary came first from Litchfield to the San Qui (Isho) river and

The spelling of the names for this area approved by the Board on Geographic Names is *Valdian*. Throughout this paper, we have used the name *the New Waldian*. (v)

TRANSCRIPTION - ORIGINAL FOLLOWS

[paragraphs excised]

Travel within the Wakhan depends on weather conditions. It's easiest to traverse the area from mid July through November. At other times of the year travel is possible, but usually involves considerably greater problems and occasionally risks. Heavy snow is common in December - February period and the valleys often become clogged with drifts when winds sweep down from mountain peaks and ridges. Temperatures lower than [illeg] below [illeg] an additional hazard to travel. During spring and early summer melting snow and ice result in muddy slippery trails. [2 lines illeg]

(C)

[same page, second column]

Alternate Routes

Other access to northern Afghanistan [illeg] China is along ancient trade routes that access northern Pakistan and enter Wakhan and [illeg] over high passes through the Hindu Kush mountains. Most of the Hindu Kush passes are open only a few months of the year and only a minimal amount of [3 words illeg] over these mountain routes. (C)

[paragraph excised]

Use of Wakhan by China

Resources and speculation [5 words illeg]
press that China is supplying the Afghan [illeg]
with guns and advisers directly through the Wakhan
connection or indirectly via the [2 words illeg] Highway
[lines excised]

[5 lines illeg]

Alternate Routes

Other access to northern Afghanistan from China is along ancient trade routes that cross northern Pakistan and enter Wakhan and Badkhash over high passes through the Hindu Kush mountains. Most of the Hindu Kush passes are open only a few months of the year and only a minimal amount of commerce is handled over these mountain routes. (U)

Travel within Wakhan depends on weather conditions. It is easiest to traverse the area from mid-July through November. At other times of the year travel is possible but usually involves considerable greater problems and occasionally risks. Heavy snow is common in the December-February period, and the valleys often become clogged with drifts when winds sweep snow down mountain peaks and ridges. Temperatures lower than 20° below zero pose an additional hazard to travel there. During spring and early summer melting snow and ice result in muddy, slippery trails and swollen streams, which must be crossed and can cause mud slides. (U)

Use of Wakhan by China

Rumors and speculations concerning the use of the press that China is supplying the Afghan insurgents with guns and advisors directly through the Wakhan connection or indirectly via the Karakoram Highway. (U)

See appendix A for a list of the sources. (U)

For example, in these and other cases, the magnitude of the attack is 10 or 15 or more persons. One can would expect to have more than 100 or more persons. (U)

See appendix B for a description of these events. (U)





Appendix B

Population Groups in Wakhan

The Talks

An estimated 5,000 to 8,000 [words illeg] Corridor. They belong to a subgroup known as [words illeg] are adherents of the [words illeg] is the Aga Khan. They are of medium height and generally have brown hair and eyes and a generous amount Mongoloid [words illeg] however, for Wakhan Tariks to have yellow or red hair [words illeg] combination of high cheekbones and the [illeg] eyelid. The Tariks speak Waxhi (Vakhi) a dialect of the [illeg] family of the last Iranian languages, many of them also speak Dari, the Afghan form of Persian.

The Tayiks are already self reliant and usually [4 words illeg] farmers and herders. The principle crops are [illeg] beans, [illeg] and highland wheat and barley. The irrigated fields are [illeg] and require large quantities of manure to even a moderate yield. Animals [illeg] cattle, goats, sheep, and ponies are shifted [words illeg] pastures. Settlements - Wakhan are hamlets composed of [words illeg] extended families, each of which can have a dozen or as many as [illeg] members. (C)

Tayik society is nontribal but kinship structure predominates the political groups. The heads of traditionally important families form a [illeg] and the headman [illeg] is selected from among its members. The office is not hereditary [illeg] power and tenure depend on his personality and the amount of [illeg] and support he can maintain. (C)

Appendix B

Population Groups in Wakhan

The Tajiks

An estimated 50,000-60,000 Tajiks live in the Wakhan Corridor. They belong to a subgroup known as "Central Asian Tajiks" who are adherents of the formative Shia sect of Islam and whose ancestors lived in the Aga Khan. They are of medium height and generally have brown hair and eyes and a generous amount of Mongoloid admixture. They are robust, however, for Wakhan Tajiks have yellow or red hair in some cases, in combination with high cheekbones and the epicanthic eyelid. The Tajiks speak Wakhi (Wakhi), a dialect of the Pamir family of the Indo-Iranian languages; many of them also speak what the Afghan term of Persian.

The Tajiks are a hardy, self-reliant and usually "noble" group of men and farmers and herders. Their principal crops are rice, beans, millet and highland wheat and barley. The irrigated fields are terraced and require large quantities of manure to get even a moderate yield. Animals -- cattle, goats, sheep and ponies -- are shifted seasonally to highland pastures. Settlements in Wakhan are hamlets surrounded by small, scattered extended families, each of which can have a dozen or more as members (1).

Tajik society is matrilineal but kinship structure dominates the political process. The heads of traditionally important families form a council and the headman (malik) is elected from among its members. The office is not hereditary; a malik's power and tenure depend on his personality and the amount of influence and support he can muster (2).

TRANSCRIPTION - ORIGINAL FOLLOWS

The Kurghiz

The Kirghiz who have inhabited the pumir area on the [illeg] of the Wakhan Corridor are pastoral people. They are shorter than average in height and have coarse black hair, dark brown eyes, broad faces and epicanthic eyefold. They speak Turkic dialect of the [illeg] family of languages and are members of the Sunnisect of Islam. Their society's tribal inorganization and they have little in common except as followers of Islam with their Tajik [illeg] ghors.

The Wakhan Kirgha numbered fewer than [words illeg] their access to China was cut off they suffered [illeg] hardships from year round isolation in the bitter cold of the high gumirya [illeg]. Probably few if any Kirghiz now remain in Wakhan. (C)

This branch of the Kirghiz had [illeg] temporarily moved the animals [2 words illeg] sheep and some [words illeg] around Kashgar in Chinese Turkistan. During the winter they received religious instruction, some medical treatment and [words illeg] members raised grain for the entire [illeg] tribe. [words illeg] Resolution [words illeg] migration routes through Russian and Chinese [words illeg] closed. The Afghan Government offered them [words illeg] Badikhsan but they refused to become lowlanders partly [illeg] headman's position depended on keeping them together [words illeg] political and [words illeg]. (C)

Under the strong leadership of Khan Kahman Quol (Kahman [illeg]) Wakhan Kirghiz managed to survive economically through [words illeg] of their animals [illeg] animal products in Kabul. What the Wakhan Kirghiz [illeg] not [illeg] however was significant mortality rate of nearly [illeg] and the death of nearly one third of their women [two words illeg]. In addition, denial of access to other mullahs in China placed the burden of religious instruction and education on the shoulders of the [illeg] illiteracy increased since one individual [illeg] reach more than a few people.

[paragraph excised]

The Kirghiz

The Kirghiz, who have inhabited the pamiir area in the Pamir Knot and the Wakhan Corridor, are a pastoral people. They are shorter in average in height and have coarse black hair, dark brown eyes, broad faces, and prominent eyebrows. They speak a Turkic dialect of the Altai family of languages and are members of the Sunni sect of Islam. Their customs are tribal in organization and they have little in common except as followers of Islam with their Tajik neighbors. (1)

The Wakhan Kirghiz numbered fewer than 1,000 in the early 1950s after their access to China was cut off. They suffered great hardships from year-round isolation in the bitter cold of the high pamiir valleys. Probably few, if any, Kirghiz now remain in Wakhan. (1)

This branch of the Kirghiz had customarily raised the animals, goats, ponies, sheep, and some Bactrian camels, to graze in the summer valleys around Khashgar in Chinese Turkestan. During the winter they received religious instruction, some medical treatment, and some of the food. Members raised grain for the entire year in the Khashgar Valley. After the Russian Revolution (1917) and the Chinese Civil War (1949) the possibility of migration routes through Russian and Chinese territory was greatly reduced. The Afghan Government offered them land in the mountainous Badkhashan but they refused to become hilllanders, partly because they could not tolerate the heat of the summer valleys and partly because their headmen's tribal organization depended on keeping them together as a political and economic unit. (1)

Under the strong leadership of Khan Rahman (Joud) Rahman, the Wakhan Kirghiz managed to survive economically though they had to give up their animals and an important stock trade. What the Wakhan Kirghiz could not do, but however with a constant mortality rate of nearly 50 percent and the death of nearly one third of their women and children in addition denial of access to the mountains and China passed by the denial of religious instruction and education to the youngsters of the tribe. Illiterates increased since one individual could not reach more than a few people.